

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Finfish Management Advisory Committee (FMAC)
380 Fenwick Road, Fort Monroe, VA
(Virtual meeting)
Wednesday, January 25th, 2023

ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Jeff Deem
Alex Aspinwall
Marcus Simes
Michael Lightfoot
Will Bransom
Skip Feller
Alex Perez
Scott MacDonald
Ernest Bowden
Mark Sanford
Tom Powers
John Bello

Members Absent

Meade Amory

VMRC Staff Present

Pat Geer
Shanna Madsen
Joshua McGilly
Alexa Galván
Jill Ramsey
Somers Smott
Lewis Gillingham
Brooke Lowman

Others Present

Susanna Musick
Terry Ramsey
Bill Pappas

Minutes prepared by Joshua McGilly.

I. FMAC Announcements

This meeting was conducted via electronic communication (WebEx). Chairman Jeff Deem called the meeting to order at 5:00pm.

II. Approval of minutes from the March 7th and October 18th, 2022 meetings

The March 7, 2022, meeting minutes were approved by consent and the minutes from the October 18, 2022 meeting were approved with edits. Mr. Tom Powers' requested a comment be added to the October minutes linking the large number of speckled trout seen in the Chesapeake Bay to voluntary reductions to the recreational bag limits.

III. Recreational Black Sea Bass Management Measures

Ms. Alexa Galván informed the committee that a ten percent coastwide reduction in recreational black sea bass harvest will be needed for the 2023 season. Harvest is projected to exceed the recreational harvest limit in 2023. With the recreational harvest overage and biomass estimate, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) determined that a ten percent reduction to the recreational black sea fishery will be needed coastwide. Under regional conservation equivalency, VMRC is working with other technical committee members from southern region states (DE, MD, and NC) to propose management measures that would reduce regional harvest by ten percent and these options will be considered by the ASMFC. Ms. Galván showed a table with the current measures and three proposed options for the minimum size, bag limit, and season. The three options kept the minimum size limit and bag limit the same and suggested possible season closures in late July, early October, or from mid-October through the end of the year. The length of each closure was determined by harvest rates within those periods. Possible season closures were considered in late July, early October, or from mid-October through the end of the year

Ms. Galván asked the committee and public for preferred options or other ideas. Mr. Alex Aspinwall asked why a closure was not considered for the beginning of the season around May. Ms. Galván said the committee has not supported a May closure in the past due to a limited number of other species to target. Mr. Skip Feller agreed a May closure would not be preferred and favored the option that would close the recreational fishery in late July. Mr. Feller discussed all the other species that can be targeted instead of sea bass during the summer. Mr. Bill Pappas supported the closure in late July and does not support a closure in May. Mr. Pappas would also like any payback for the February seabass season to also be taken in July. The committee spoke in favor of taking a single lump closure instead of multiple closures. Ms. Galván agreed with the timing of the February closure and said once the February harvest estimate is available, the committee will be consulted on the payback closure. Mr. Tom Powers made a motion to recommend option for a late July closure presented by Ms. Galván and was seconded by Mr. Marc Simes. The motion was approved unanimously.

IV. Updates

A. Speckled trout stock assessment update

Mr. Joshua McGilly updated the committee on the joint North Carolina and Virginia speckled trout stock assessment. The assessment passed peer review in August 2022 and the final report was released in October 2022. The main findings from the assessment are the stock is not overfished but overfishing is occurring. Mr. Mark Sanford asked about release mortality and the differences between landings for recreational and commercial landings. Deputy Chief Shanna Madsen discussed that specific numbers were listed in the stock assessment and any decisions on speckled trout will be discussed with the committee before moving forward with new measures. Mrs.

Susanna Musick asked about how release mortality was determined in the model, and Mr. McGilly explained a published release mortality percentage (10%) for speckled trout was used to estimate release mortality.

Mr. Deem asked a follow up question about the amount of scientific uncertainty contributed to the number of allowable catch, Ms. Galván said the ASMFC materials would have all of this information and it could be sent to Mr. Deem.

Deputy Chief Madsen informed the committee that two more commercial seats on FMAC will need to be filled so there is even recreational and commercial representation on the committee. These openings will be posted on the website. Deputy Chief Madsen also informed the committee that former Deputy Chief Adam Kenyon has become Chief of the Shellfish Division and will no longer be involved with the committee.

Mr. Michael Lightfoot asked some questions about the recent commission meeting regarding black sea bass and if there were any changes to striped bass quota. Mrs. Jill Ramsey said Virginia's commercial striped bass quota has not changed. Mr. Lightfoot brought to the committees' attention that a bill providing state funding for expanding the commercial blue catfish fishery is being discussed at the General Assembly. He requested a discussion on commercial blue catfish landings by gear at a future in person FMAC meeting. Deputy Chief Madsen suggested to wait until the General Assembly was over to see exactly what the legislation entails so the discussion can be more productive.

V. Public comment on items not on the agenda

No public comments were received after discussing the speckled trout stock assessment update.

VI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:48 pm.